



TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD BY HARPER LEE

READING GUIDE QUESTIONS AND EXTRACTS:

To Kill a Mockingbird is one of the world's most enduringly popular novels for readers of all ages, an unforgettable classic. The below questions and extracts are designed to be discussed throughout the course of a full reading group session. Alternatively, you'll also find below a quick fifteen minute guide to discussing *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the beginning or end of a reading group session.

Scout, our narrator, is telling the story as an adult looking back at her childhood. What impression do we get of Scout's life now? How does she view her hometown of Maycomb? Why does Harper Lee choose to tell the narrative through the eyes of a child?

The characters are often defined and segregated by their ancestry and race. Do you believe this means the characters' actions are pre-destined, prescribed by their origins and parentage? What does *TKAM* tell us about the importance of history and ancestry in the USA?

Atticus is the moral compass for his children, and for the reader. How does Atticus embody a sense of justice, not just in his job, but in his character and actions? What are Atticus' character flaws? Does Atticus remind you of any other well-known characters in fiction?

Which characters undergo the biggest change over the course of the novel? What is this change driven by?

Jem describes to Scout the four 'folks' or classes of people in Maycomb County: 'our kind of folks don't like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don't like the Ewells, and the Ewells hate and despise the colored folks.' How does this describe the way class and race are viewed in 1930s Alabama? Why does Jem summarise society in this way? Does Jem's view seem dated to you as a contemporary reader?

To Kill a Mockingbird is often used as a text in schools and children are encouraged to read it at a young age, even though it portrays conflict between children and adults, uses ungrammatical speech, makes references to sex, the supernatural, witchcraft and racial slurs. What makes *Mockingbird* a suitable book for school curriculums and children's reading lists? Do you think these points make it a controversial choice for young readers?

To Kill a Mockingbird is often cited as a modern classic. In your opinion, what are the defining features of 'a classic'? How do these features relate to *Mockingbird*?





CHOOSE FROM THE FOLLOWING KEY PASSAGES TO READ FROM AND DISCUSS:

p.5 Introduction to Maycomb

Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the court-house sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then; a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum.

People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people; Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.

p.33 Advice from Atticus

Atticus stood up and walked to the end of the porch. When he completed his examination of the wistaria vine he strolled back to me.

'First of all,' he said, 'if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view -'

'Sir?'

'- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.'

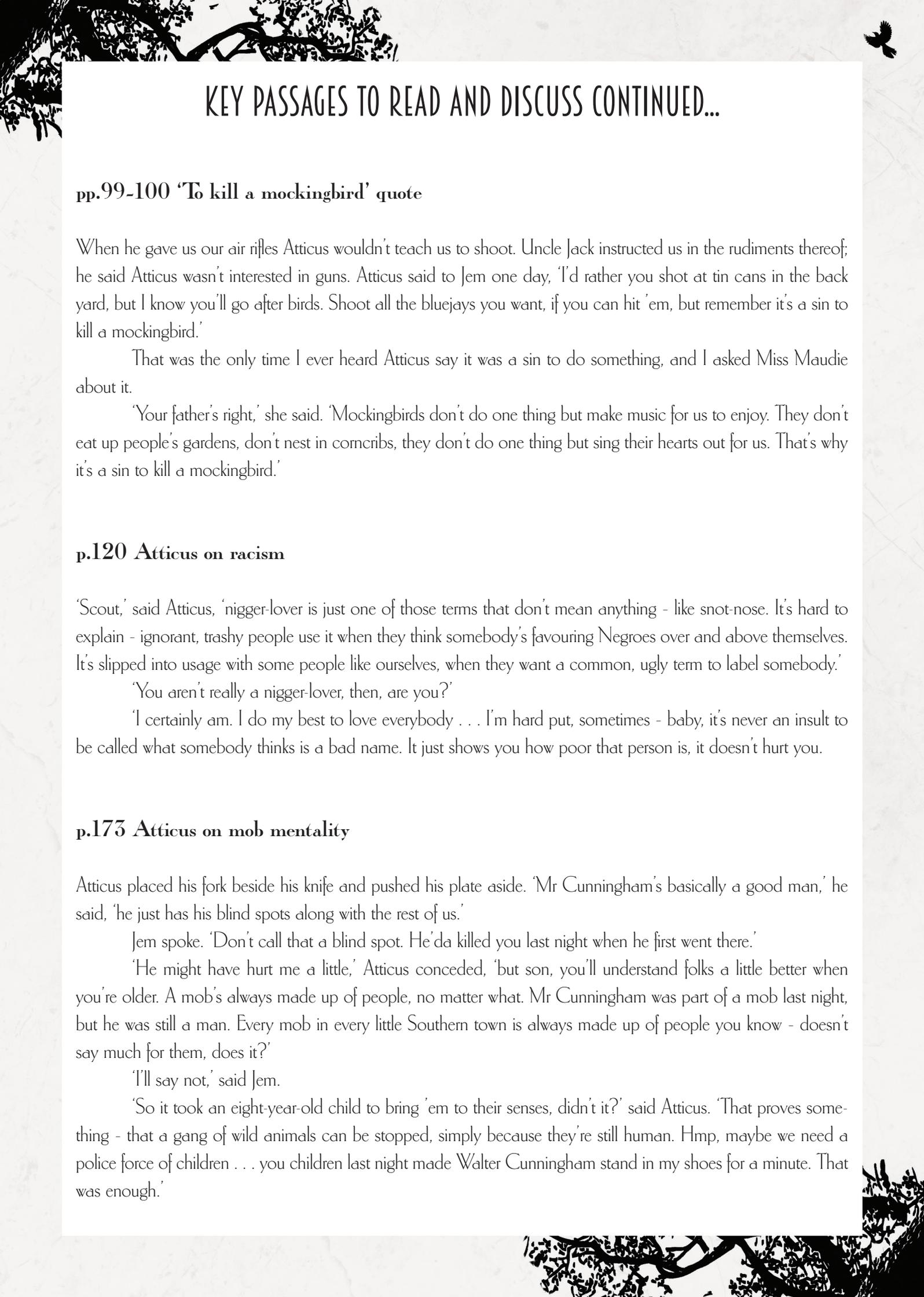
p.50 Wisdom from Miss Maudie

Miss Maudie stopped rocking, and her voice hardened. 'You are too young to understand it,' she said, 'but sometimes the Bible in the hand of one man is worse than a whisky bottle in the hand of - oh, of your father.'

I was shocked. 'Atticus doesn't drink whisky,' I said. 'He never drunk a drop in his life - nome, yes he did. He said he drank some one time and didn't like it.'

Miss Maudie laughed. 'Wasn't talking about your father,' she said. 'What I meant was, if Atticus Finch drank until he was drunk he wouldn't be as hard as some men are at their best. There are just some kind of men who - who're so busy worrying about the next world they've never learned to live in this one, and you can look down the street and see the results.'





KEY PASSAGES TO READ AND DISCUSS CONTINUED...

pp.99-100 'To kill a mockingbird' quote

When he gave us our air rifles Atticus wouldn't teach us to shoot. Uncle Jack instructed us in the rudiments thereof; he said Atticus wasn't interested in guns. Atticus said to Jem one day, 'I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.'

That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it.

'Your father's right,' she said. 'Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.'

p.120 Atticus on racism

'Scout,' said Atticus, 'nigger-lover is just one of those terms that don't mean anything - like snot-nose. It's hard to explain - ignorant, trashy people use it when they think somebody's favouring Negroes over and above themselves. It's slipped into usage with some people like ourselves, when they want a common, ugly term to label somebody.'

'You aren't really a nigger-lover, then, are you?'

'I certainly am. I do my best to love everybody . . . I'm hard put, sometimes - baby, it's never an insult to be called what somebody thinks is a bad name. It just shows you how poor that person is, it doesn't hurt you.'

p.173 Atticus on mob mentality

Atticus placed his fork beside his knife and pushed his plate aside. 'Mr Cunningham's basically a good man,' he said, 'he just has his blind spots along with the rest of us.'

Jem spoke. 'Don't call that a blind spot. He'da killed you last night when he first went there.'

'He might have hurt me a little,' Atticus conceded, 'but son, you'll understand folks a little better when you're older. A mob's always made up of people, no matter what. Mr Cunningham was part of a mob last night, but he was still a man. Every mob in every little Southern town is always made up of people you know - doesn't say much for them, does it?'

'I'll say not,' said Jem.

'So it took an eight-year-old child to bring 'em to their senses, didn't it?' said Atticus. 'That proves something - that a gang of wild animals can be stopped, simply because they're still human. Hmp, maybe we need a police force of children . . . you children last night made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute. That was enough.'

KEY PASSAGES TO READ AND DISCUSS CONTINUED...

p.243 Atticus on justice and race

'If you had been on that jury, son, and eleven other boys like you, Tom would be a free man,' said Atticus. 'So far nothing in your life has interfered with your reasoning process. Those are twelve reasonable men in everyday life, Tom's jury, but you saw something come between them and reason. You saw the same thing that night in front of the jail. When that crew went away, they didn't go as reasonable men, they went because we were there. There's something in our world that makes men lose their heads - they couldn't be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins. They're ugly, but those are the facts of life.'

'Doesn't make it right,' said Jem stolidly. He beat his fist softly on his knee. 'You can't just convict a man on evidence like that - you can't.'

You couldn't, but they could and did. The older you grow the more of it you'll see. The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a court-room, be he any colour of the rainbow, but people have a way of carrying their resentments right into a jury box. As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it - whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash.'

p.298 Meeting Boo Radley

They were white hands, sickly white hands that had never seen the sun, so white they stood out garishly against the dull cream wall in the dim light of Jem's room.

I looked from his hands to his sand-stained khaki pants; my eyes travelled up his thin frame to his torn shirt. His face was as white as his hands, but for a shadow on his jutting chin. His cheeks were thin to hollowness; his mouth was wide; there were shallow, almost delicate indentations at his temples, and his grey eyes were so colourless I thought he was blind. His hair was dead and thin, almost feathery on top of his head.

When I pointed to him his palms slipped slightly, leaving greasy sweat streaks on the wall, and he hooked his thumbs in his belt. A strange small spasm shook him, as if he heard fingernails scrape slate, but as I gazed at him in wonder the tension slowly drained from his face. His lips parted into a timid smile, and our neighbour's image blurred with my sudden tears.

'Hey, Boo,' I said.

Extended passages:

pp.9-12, The Radley House: 'The Radley Place fascinated Dill . . . there were other ways of making people into ghosts.'

pp.48-51, Miss Maudie: 'In summertime, twilights are long and peaceful . . . I liked it very much.'

pp.220-222, Mr Raymond: "Come on round here, son . . . step back inside the courthouse."

pp.224-227, Atticus' defence speech: "I say guilt, gentlemen . . . In the name of God, do your duty."



A FIFTEEN MINUTE DISCUSSION ABOUT TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD:

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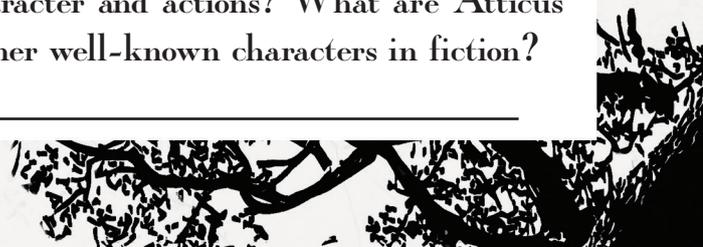
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Go Set a Watchman is set during the mid-1950s and features many of the characters from *To Kill a Mockingbird* some twenty years later. Scout (Jean Louise Finch) has returned to Maycomb from New York to visit Atticus. She is forced to grapple with issues both personal and political as she tries to understand both her father's attitude toward society, and her own feelings about the place where she was born and spent her childhood.

What sort of adult do you think Scout Finch is? How do you imagine her relationship with her father might have changed? Are you excited, nervous or both to read the recently discovered novel?

HARPER LEE

GO SET A

WATCHMAN



BE PART OF THE STORY:

